

Publication		
SA FRUIT JOURNAL		
Page	Date	AVE (ZAR)
12	Fri 01 Apr 2022	16396.67



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# 5 questions for Dr Sifiso Ntombela

Dr Sifiso Ntombela, chief economist of the National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC), was recently appointed as deputy president of the Agricultural Economics Association of SA.

Elise-Marie Steenkamp met with him for a brief discussion.



Dr Sifiso Ntombela



## Q What are agriculture's biggest challenges locally, in Africa and in the rest of the world?

**A** Locally, the main challenge is to expand the growth and competitiveness of the agricultural sector in a manner that is inclusive and sustainable. Regionally, the challenge is strengthened trade facilitation capacity to promote intra-African trade that capitalises on the recently signed African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). At a global level, subsidies and the uses of sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS) and technical barriers to trade (TBTs) to distort global agricultural markets, remain a big challenge. This is witnessed in the South African markets, in particular for poultry and sugar where the rise of imports from subsidised countries is distorting the local market.

## Q How should the sector respond to this – locally, in Africa and globally?

**A** Locally, the private-public-academic partnerships are ideal to generate evidence-based policy advisory and to achieve competitive growth in the sector. Such partnerships could upscale access to means of production, modern research, and development and innovation. Through these partnerships access to blended and soft loans that are critical for farmers' sustainability will be expanded, thus achieving inclusive growth and decent jobs in the sector. At continent level, upscaling infrastructure development to reduce logistical costs and relieve border-post delays could elevate intra-African trade and expansion of agricultural production. This will also attract new investment in agriculture throughout the African continent. At world level, support to the World Trade Organisation to reinforce compliance to global trade rules is key. With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic the majority of countries instituted a variety of non-tariff measures to protect their domestic countries, and there is a need to reinforce the principles of trade openness to ensure efficient and effective global agricultural markets.

## Q What do you consider to be the key success factors that should result from the process around the AAMP?

**A** A stronger public-private-academia partnership to leverage common resources, experience, and skills in the

implementation of the Agriculture and Agro-Processing Master Plan (AAMP). A clear model to integrate previously disadvantaged individuals in the formal agricultural value chains coupled with building a capable state to provide public services, are the key expected outcomes from the master plan.

## Q Would you encourage young people to pursue a career in agriculture?

**A** Definitely. Especially in the field of digitalisation of agricultural systems.

## Q How did being an industry bursary holder help you in your career?

**A** It provided support and opened opportunities for me. ▶

### Making a difference

Dr Sifiso Ntombela has 10 years of work experience, spanning the public and private sectors. Among his key achievements are the establishment of a credible information system in the South African fruit industry, and helping them join the Southern Hemisphere Association of Fresh Fruit Exporters (SHAFFE). Ntombela also headed the development of a master plan to increase investments and capacity in agro-processing and the rural economic sector in SA, under the Presidential Infrastructure Coordination Commission. And he managed the country's biggest infrastructure programme in the transport, energy and manufacturing sectors implemented by state-owned companies between 2015 and 2017, when he was a director for strategic projects in the Department of Public Enterprises.